Causes of the Dialect Differences between and within Western Berks and Western Lehigh Counties, Pa.

By LESTER W. J. SEIFERT, *Brown University*

IN the March 15th, 22nd, and 29th issues of this column I presented an article under the title **Dialect Differences between and within Western Berks and Western Lehigh Counties, Pa.** The materials in that article were taken from the records made by Mr. Carroll E. Reed in western Berks County and by myself in western Lehigh County during the Summer of 1940. The readers of this column will recall that items were there presented in which the people of different parts of the two regions investigated use different words in speaking of the same thing.

At the time, I was chiefly interested in showing the different types of geographic distribution occurring between western Berks and western Lehigh and also within each of them. On the whole, no attempt was made to show the factors which caused the different types of geographic distribution. Since then, I have investigated this matter as thoroughly as it is possible at present and have found a striking correlation between the different types of geographic distribution and the early settlement history of western Berks and western Lehigh. Much work must still be done in the population history and the cultural history of these areas before anything like a final explanation can be given, but it is possible to sketch the broad outlines of this problem at present.

Before going into this matter, I shall briefly outline the different types of geographic distribution in order to refresh our memories. Only one example of each type will be presented.

I. WESTERN BERKS VERSUS WESTERN LEHIGH

In this type of distribution the people of western Berks use one term and the people of western Lehigh use another in speaking of the same thing. Thus **the dog barks** in western Berks is **der Hund gauzt**, while in western Lehigh it is **der Hund blafft.**

II. SW BERKS VERSUS NW BERKS AND WESTERN LEHIGH.

In this type NW Berks has the same terms as western Lehigh, while SW Berks has other terms. The size of the NW Berks area agreeing with western Lehigh varies from word to word. **The barn-floor** is called **es Scheier-denn** in SW Berks but **es Dresch-denn** (t) in NW Berks and western Lehigh.

III. WESTERN BERKS AND NW LEHIGH VERSUS SW LEHIGH.

In this type western Berks and NW Lehigh have the same terms, while SW Lehigh has other terms. The size of the NW Lehigh area agreeing with western Berks varies from word to word. **To deny** in western Berks and NW Lehigh is **ferlegle;** in SW Lehigh it is **legle.**

IV. WESTERN BERKS AND SW LEHIGH VERSUS NW LEHIGH

In this type western Berks and SW Lehigh have the same terms, while NW Lehigh has other terms. The size of the SW Lehigh area agreeing with western Berks varies from word to word. **The cradle** in western Berks and SW Lehigh is **die Wieg;** in NW Lehigh it is **die Schockel.**

V. NE LEBANON & SW BERKS VERSUS NW BERKS & WESTERN LEHIGH.

In this type NE Lebanon and a strip of SW Berks along the Lebanon County line (varying in size from word to word) use terms different from those used in a large NW Berks area and in western Lehigh. **The pail** is called **der Kiwwel** in NE Lebanon and SW Berks, while it is called **der Eemer** in NW Berks and in western Lehigh.

VI. NE LEBANON & SW BERKS VERSUS NW BERKS VERSUS WESTERN LEHIGH.

The different forms of the diminutive suffixes, both singular and plural, fall into this type. In NE Lebanon and W Berks **the baby** is **es Bobbli, the cup** is **es Kobbli, the village** is **es Schdedtli,** and **the little bird** is **es Feggli;** in NW Berks and western Lehigh **the baby** is **es Bobbel, the cup** is **es Kobbche, the village** is sometimes **es Schdedtelche,** and **the little bird** is sometimes **es Feggliche.** In NE Lebanon and SW Berks **babies, cups, villages,** and **little birds** are **Bobblin, Kobblin, Schdedtlin,** and **Fegglin** respectively; in NW Berks they are **Bobblicher, Kobbcher, Schdedtlicher,** and **Fegglicher;** in Western Lehigh they are **Bobbelcher** (or **Bobblicher**), **Kobbcher, Schdedtelcher** (or **Schdedtlicher**) and **Feggelcher.**

VII.—SW BERKS AND WESTERN LEHIGH VERSUS NW BERKS.

In this type the people of SW Berks (this area corresponds to that described in V) and of western Lehigh use the same terms, while the people of NW Berks use others. In SW Berks and western Lehigh **die Schaufel** refers to a broad, blunt shovel and **die Schipp** refers to a narrow, pointed shovel. In NW Berks both words are used, but either one can refer to any type of shovel

VIII. THE WOMELSDORF AREA.

Certain words are used only in Womelsdorf and the area round about it in SW Berks, while other words are used in the rest of western Berks. Some words have spread farther out of Womelsdorf than others. The people of western Lehigh sometimes use the word occurring in the Womelsdorf area, sometimes use the word occurring in the rest of western Berks, and at other times use a word occuring in neither the Womelsdorf area nor in the rest of western Berks. Thus **grouchy** in the Womelsdorf area is **grimmelich** or **grummelich,** in the rest of western Berks and in NW Lehigh it is **griddelich,** and in SW Lehigh it is **gredzich** (in the former article, under Section III, Example 2, by some mistake or other the distribution of **griddelich** and **gredzich** is given as exactly opposite to what it should be).

IX. THE LEHIGH DIVISIONS.

The examples in III and IV show that the usage of western Lehigh is not entirely leveled out. In addition, there are examples showing how western Lehigh is split up in other ways. Thus **the stone-house** is **es Schdeene-haus** in a large north-central area of western Lehigh and in a smaller SW Lehigh area; round about these areas it is called **es Schdee-haus.** In western Berks it is commonly called **es Schdeenich-haus.**

This example (and others) shows how western Lehigh is split roughly into a northern area, a southern area, and a central area. Other words show how western Lehigh is split into a far-western area (a strip along the Berks County line varying in width from word to word) and a mid-western area. **To cultivate corn** is **es Welsch-karn koldiweedere** in the midwestern area, while in a broad far-western area it is **es Welsch-karn schaufle.** In western Berks **es Welsch-karn schaufle** and **es Welsch-karn schaffe** are most common, but in the Womelsdorf area it is **es Welsch-karn koldiweede** (not mentioned in the former article).

We are now ready to investigate the causes of these different types of distribution.

The Tulpehocken Settlement of western Berks dates from 1723. It was begun by a group of Palatines and Wuerttembergers who had originally been brought to the banks of the Hudson River for the purpose of making ship stores for the British navy. When this project failed because of incompetent management, many of the Germans moved westward into the Schoharie Valley of New York and took up land there. But trouble soon arose between the Germans on the one hand and the English and the Dutch on the other hand. In order to settle the dispute, the Germans were told that they must either buy the land again or move out. Many of the Germans refused to do the former and were thus forced to do the latter.

In the meantime these Germans had heard of the fairness and tolerance of the Pennsylvania authorities and therefore decided to migrate to Pennsylvania. They came down the Susquehanna River, followed Swatara Creek, and finally located on the banks of Tulpehocken Creek in western Berks. In 1729 this settlement was augmented, when the Weiser family came with another group of Germans who then settled around the present borough of Womelsdorf. From then on internal growth and new settlers from elsewhere forced this settlement to spread out in all directions.

Shortly after 1723 settlers from northern Montgomery and northern Chester Counties began to move up the Schuylkill Valley into central Berks County and by 1748 Reading was on its way toward becoming a city. From the Schuylkill Valley north of the South Mountains the settlers spread out into the fertile side-valleys, especially into those lying to the east. They moved farther and farther eastward, even as far as into western Lehigh County.

The majority of the early settlers of Berks came either directly or indirectly from the Palatinate and from the areas adjacent to the Palatinate, namely northern Alsace, the Saar, Rhine-Hesse, and northwestern Baden (formerly a part of the Palatinate). There was, however, a very large number of settlers who came directly or indirectly from Wuerttemberg. More than a mere sprinkling came from the other southwestern German areas of Hesse-Darmstadt, northeastern Baden, Lorraine, southern Alsace, the Rhine-Province, and Nassau. There were also some Swiss.

In the late 1730's, but especially in the 1740's and early 1750's, large numbers of settlers poured into present Lehigh County. Many of them moved up from the Counties of Montgomery and Bucks which were by that time quite thickly populated. Large numbers also came directly from Germany. Emmaus was established by the Moravians in 1742 and Allentown was laid out by Judge William Allen sometime before 1752. The exact sequence in which the different parts of Lehigh were settled will be discussed later on in this article.

When unoccupied land became scarce in Lehigh, the increase in population flowed in two directions: (1) to the north and northwest into present Carbon and Schuylkill Counties, (2) to the west and southwest into Berks County.

The large majority of the early settlers of Lehigh came either directly or ultimately from the Palatinate and smaller numbers came from the areas adjacent to the Palatinate. In addition there was a very large number of settlers from Wuerteemberg. The number of settlers from the other southwestern German areas mentioned above seems to have been much smaller in Lehigh than in Berks. There were also some Swiss.

From the foregoing it is evident that the early population of Lehigh on the one hand and of Berks on the other was not composed of the same German elements in the same proportions. Therefore the dialect leveling which took place led to somewhat different results in the two areas. (As a matter of fact, the survival of certain features in the speech of each area gives us valuable clues in regard to the different German elements in each area and also in regard to the relative importance of each of these elements, but I shall not go into this matter in this article.)

As a result the people concerned in the eastward movement from the Schuylkill Valley did not always use the same terms as those taking part in the westward movement from Lehigh County in speaking of the same things. As far as the eastward movement extended to the east so far were the Berks words carried and the same holds for the westward movement from Lehigh. Where the two streams of population movement met, a dialect boundary arose. This is the reason why people in western Berks say **gauzt, die Ladarn,** and **der Habbich** for **barks, lantern,** and **hawk,** while people in western Lehigh say **blafft, die Ludzer,** and **der Woi** (distribution Type I).

In the westward movement from Lehigh a good many settlers pushed far to the west along the southern base of the Blue Mountains, even beyond the Schuylkill River into northwestern Berks. At the same time the old Tulpehocken Settlement was spreading out into northwestern Berks and settlers were also moving farther and farther up the Schuylkill Valley and its side-valleys lying to the west.

Thus the early population of northwestern Berks was composed of a mixture of settlers from Berks and Lehigh to which others directly from Germany were added. The number of settlers coming directly from Germany was small, for this area was still quite thinly settled at the time of the Revolutionary War, and by that time the German migration to Pennsylvania had passed its peak. The Berks element was by far the most important.

In the dialect which arose in this area the Berks characteristics therefore predominated, but some Lehigh characteristics were incorporated into the dialect and survive to this day. The westward movement from Lehigh became weaker and weaker the farther west it got so that there are fewer Lehigh dialcet characteristics in extreme northwestern Berks than in the area just west of the Schuylkill River. This is why people in northwestern Berks agree with people in western Lehigh in saying **der Schwamm, der Schneb,** and **es Dresch-denn** (t) for **meadow, bundle,** and **barn-floor,** while people in southwestern Berks say **die Wies** or **Wiss, die** or **der Garreb,** and **es Scheier-denn** (distribution Type II).

The eastward movement from Berks became progressively weaker the farther it was removed from the Schuylkill Valley. The Allemaengel Settlement in present Albany Township, Berks County and in Lynn and Weisenberg Townships, Lehigh County represents the limits of this movement towards the northeast. After leaving the Schuylkill Valley, these settlers came up along the valley of Ontalaunee (or Maiden) Creek and in northwestern Lehigh County they took up land in the valley between the Blue Mountain and the Schoharie, in Kistler's Valley (lying south of the Schoharie), and in the valleys of northwestern Weisenberg Township. This first settlement occurred sometime in the 1730's. Very shortly thereafter the Welsh and Scotch-Irish occupied the northern part of Lynn Township. From 1740 on, large numbers of Germans from Bucks and Montgomery Counties (as well as directly from Germany) came into northwestern Lehigh County.

In time, the Berks settlement of Allemaengel was absorbed by the Lehigh settlement, but some traces of the Berks settlers can still be found in the dialect of northwestern Lehigh. This is why people in northwestern Lehigh agree with the people in western Berks in saying **ferlegle** and **der Hiwwel** for **to deny** and **the hill,** while the people of southwestern Lehigh say **legle** and **der Barrick** or **Baerrick** (distribution Type III).

(To Be Concluded)

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der Fraa ihre Aage, die Geeschel uff ihrem Buckel, es Biewel in Aengschte. Noh grieg ich en Schmaerz in mei Haerz un en hesslicher Zarn fliegt in mich. Ich kann mer net helfe, ich reiss der Schuss uff, es Wasser schiesst uffs Raad un die Redder gehne rum! . . . Ich hab gemeent, ich hett ebber heere greische . . . verleicht hawwich's aa yuscht gemeent.

"Well . . die Fraa hot ihn schee un arndlich begrawwe. Nau muss en Miller bei—ich bin gebliwwe. In me Yohr hen mer gheiert, un mer hen zwee Kinner ghatte, en Bu un en Maedel. Unser Kinner waare en Luscht zu hawwe un en Ehr zu ihre Eltre. So hem mer in Friede haerrlich gelebt, bis die Fraa siwwezich Yohr alt waar, noh hawwich sie dohaer gelegt. Glei noochderhand schlof ich mol ee Nacht ei un bin nimmi wacker warre, un sie hen mich dohie gelegt. Eb ich recht geduh hab odder net, iss net far mich zusaage, yuscht wann ich mich druwwle wott, wie der Schwammbach wee-ich seim Eckschtee, hett ich en anneri Gschicht uff Hand. Nau, mach dich fart! Loss mich in der Ruh!"

Lloyd A. Moll, the author of the above artful narrative, is the popular columnist, whose 'S GEBABBEL IM SCHTOR appears thrice weekly on the editorial page of the Evening Chronicle.

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(Conclusion)

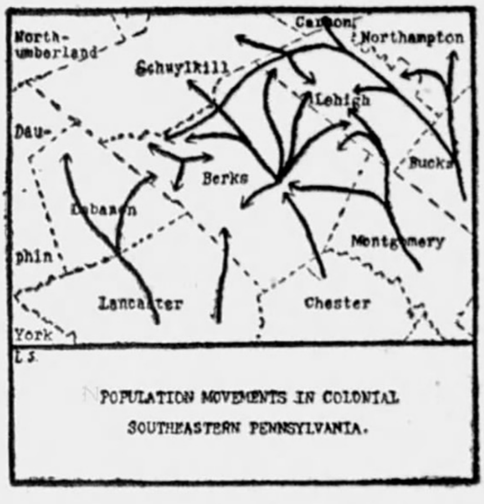
The settlement of southwestern Lehigh had begun already in the 1730's, but it was in the 1740's that great numbers of settlers came into the region lying north of the Lehigh (or South) Mountains. Many of these settlers came up from northern Montgomery County, but many also came directly from Germany. In addition, there was a considerable number of settlers who came from Berks for in the course of the eastward movement from the Schuylkill Valley some people came as far east as southwestern Lehigh. This part of the eastward movement followed the course of Ontalaunee (or Maiden) Creek, branched off into the fertile Maxatawny Valley, and then spilled over into southwestern Lehigh.

In time, the settlers from Berks were absorbed by the population of Lehigh, but certain features of the Berks dialect, brought in by these early settlers, are still to be found in the dialect of southwestern Lehigh. This is the reason why people in southwestern Lehigh agree with people in western Berks in saying **die Wieg and der Baam-gohrde** or **Bohm-gaarde** for **Cradle and orchard**, while the people in northwestern Lehigh say **die Schockel** and **der Bungert** or **Bummert** (distribution Type IV).

The settlement of southwestern Lehigh has been much less thoroughly investigated than that of northwestern Lehigh. Local historians would do well to busy themselves with this matter, while information is still available.

The beginnings of the settlement of Lancaster County date from 1708-1709. The first settlers came from Switzerland, and the Swiss who came to Pennsylvania in the following years also showed a preference for settling in Lancaster. Ties of blood and friendship are undoubtedly the reasons why the Swiss tended to settle in this one area. In addition, large numbers of settlers from southwestern Germany soon came to Lancaster also.

Thus the early population of Lancaster County contained an important element, the Swiss, which was quite unimportant in the population of Berks



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and Lehigh, although not entirely lacking in these two counties. As a result, the dialect which developed in Lancaster differs somewhat from the dialects which developed in Berks and Lehigh.

From Lancaster County settlers crossed the South Mountains into present Lebanon County and in time occupied almost the entire county. From Lebanon settlers moved into a fringe of southwestern Berks along the present Lebanon County line. Here the movement from Lebanon met the outskirts of the Tulpehocken Settlement and expansion in this direction was stopped thereby. Since the dialects of these two settlements differed somewhat from each other, a dialect boundary arose where the two settlements met. This is why the people in northeastern Lebanon and southwestern Berks say **der Kiwwel** and **blos-kebbich** for **the pail** and **bare-headed**, while the people in northwestern Berks and western Lehigh say **der Eemer** and **blott-kebbich** (distribution Type V).

The distribution of the singular forms of the diminutive suffies is also due to the meeting of these two settlements. The importance of the Swiss element and of the other Alemannic elements in the population of Lancaster and in the population of the regions settled from Lancaster is proved by the suffix **-li**, used in the dialects of Switzerland, southern Baden, and southeastern Alsace. The importance of the Palatine element and of the other Franconian elements in the population of Berks and Lehigh is attested by the suffix **-che**, used in the Franconian dialects of southwestern Germany. **-elche** is also restricted to the Franconian dialects, but **-el** is used in some Franconian and in some Alemannic dialects. **-liche** occurs in no dialect in Germany and is a Pennsylvania German creation resulting from adding both **-li** and **-che** to one and the same word.

The distribution of the plural forms of the diminutive suffixes is partly due to the factors causing distribution Type V and partly due to the factors causing distribution Type I. The **-lin** of northeastern Lebanon and southwestern Berks is again proof of the strong Alemannic element in the population of this area. The **-cher** of northwestern Berks and western Lehigh again shows the importance of the Franconian element in the population of these areas. The **-licher** of northwestern Berks is a plural formed to go with the singular suffix **-liche**, which in turn is a Pennsylvania German creation. The **-elcher** of western Lehigh is excellent proof of the importance of the eastern Palatine element in the population of Lehigh, for in southwestern Germany this suffix is restricted almost entirely to the eastern Palatinate.

So far no way has been found of explaining the somewhat rare type of distribution presented in VII.

The cause of distribution Type VIII, in which the Womelsdorf area differs from the rest of western Berks, was briefly discussed in the former article, but it may be well to bring all the material together in this place. This type is due not so much to settlement history as to influences wielded by a cultural center.

Womelsdorf was part of the old Tulpehocken Settlement. In 1729 the famous Weiser family located near the edge of the present borough. Very early it developed into the economic and cultural center for all the surrounding countryside, a position it has maintained to this day. The presence of the Weiser family very likely gave the village an importance which would otherwise have been lacking. From such a center features of language as well as customs and manners spread out into the more rural sections. Although there has always been a certain tension between country people and city dwellers, yet the country people have always to some extent imitated the "more refined" culture of the city dwellers.

The way in which western Lehigh is split up is again the result of its settlement history, certain aspects of which have already been presented.

Northwestern Lehigh was settled from the 1730's on, earlier than any other part of Lehigh. As was shown above, part of the settlers came from Berks, but the majority came up from Bucks and Montgomery or directly from southwestern Germany. The other racial elements (Welsh, Scotch-Irish, and French Huguenots) were either crowded out or absorbed by the Germans.

The early settlers crossed the rolling central part of Lehigh, now considered one of the best agricultural regions of Pennsylvania, because it was covered with scrub oak instead of open forests and therefore considered less fertile than the hills and valleys in the northwestern part of the county. When the northern part of the county became quite thickly settled, people began to move southward into the more level sections of Lehigh.

The southern part of Lehigh began to be settled in the late 1730's, but the main settlement occurred in the 1740's. It was settled largely by people coming up from Montgomery County or coming directly from Germany, although there were considerable numbers from Berks, as we have already seen. In southern Lehigh they again first took up the lands lying on the hills and in the valleys leading up to the Lehigh Mountains and only gradually expanded into the more level sections of Lehigh lying towards the north.

In time, the expansion from the northern settlements and from the southern settlements met and this "seam" gave rise to the word boundaries in western Lehigh which run roughly from east to west and divide western Lehigh into a northern area, a central area, and a southern area.

The eastward expansion from Berks was not entirely limited to northwestern and southwestern Lehigh, although the main currents of this movement seem to have been deflected in these two directions. Some Berks settlers also took up land in the western part of central Lehigh. These Berks settlers have again left a few traces in the dialect of western Lehigh. This accounts for the word boundaries in western Lehigh which run roughly from north to south and divide western Lehigh into a far-western area (a strip of western Lehigh along the Berks County line, varying in width from word to word) and a midwestern area. The lines dividing the far-western area from the midwestern area indicate the limits of the eastward movement from the Schuylkill Valley.

The population movements have been summarized on the accompanying map. This map shows the four main types of population movement: (1) There is first of all a movement northward from the southern counties. (2) There is an eastward movement from the Schuylkill Valley, from the Tulpehocken Settlement, and from Lebanon County. (3) There is a westward movement from Lehigh County, from the Schuylkill Valley, and from the Tulpehocken Settlement. (4) There is a southward movement from the northern Lehigh settlements and from the Tulpehocken Settlement. All of these movements have produced word boundaries in the Pennsylvania German spoken in western Lehigh and western Berks Counties. It is interesting to note that only in the language has any trace survived of these early population movements which came to an end between a century and a half and two centuries ago.